K9 and the BEASTS OF VEGA

DAVID MARTIN

FROM: Gallifrey Databank
TO: Gallifrey High Command

CLASSIFICATION: Most Secret

SUBJECT: K9
HISTORY: Robot dog designed and first constructed by a certain Professor Marius (type: Earth, male) in year 5000 A.D. Built as a mobile computer unit and pet replacement. Later modified by Time Lord Theta Sigma (also known as 'The Doctor') to improve performance.

POTENTIAL USE: Now capable of independent missions in situations classed as too dangerous for Time Lord intervention.

EQUIPMENT: Sophisticated polysensory tracking systems. Self-energising drive and decision-making capability. Multi-phase photon-blaster infinitely variable from 'immobilisation' to 'dematerialisation'.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: Spacecraft K-NEL. Ion rocket motors (3) only. No time-travel facility. Operated as extension of K9's central computer. No armaments. Shape, smooth triangular block. Colour, white. Speed: UNDISCLOSED.

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K9

and the BEASTS OF VEGA

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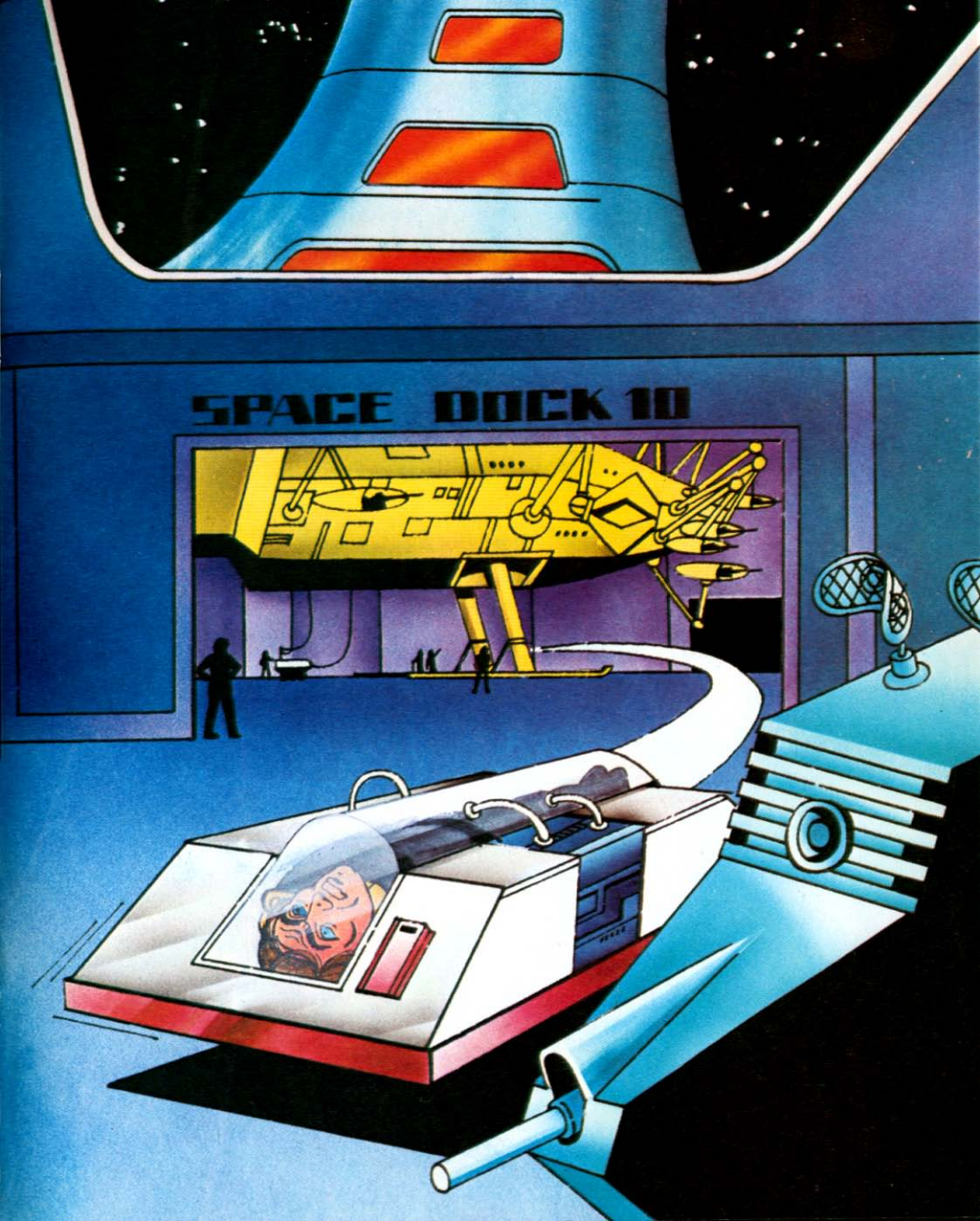
K9 watched the last of the crewmen being ferried across to the hospital. The crewman's eyes were blue and staring, and he trembled uncontrollably inside the vacuum stretcher. Yet their ship, SPACESHIFTER 138, lay unmarked, its yellow paintwork gleaming, and its sapphire-tipped laser-jibs and gigantic steel struts glinting in the Vegan sun.


SPACE DOCK 10

'Here on Vega 3,' said Professor Romius as she led K9 through the isolation ward, 'we are twenty-seven light years from Earth. We don't expect any help, and normally we don't need any. But this is the fourth ship we've lost —'

'Correction,' said K9. 'You have not lost the ship, and the crew are still alive.'

When they were out of earshot of the crewmen, Professor Romius turned to K9. 'You call that being alive?' she said bitterly.

In the lab K9 linked himself on-line to the medical computer.

In microseconds he knew all there was to know about the accidents. Every crewman, from the captains to the rockhandlers, had suffered the same fate. Not one of them could move, speak or hear. Their limbs trembled and their eyes were open and staring day and night.

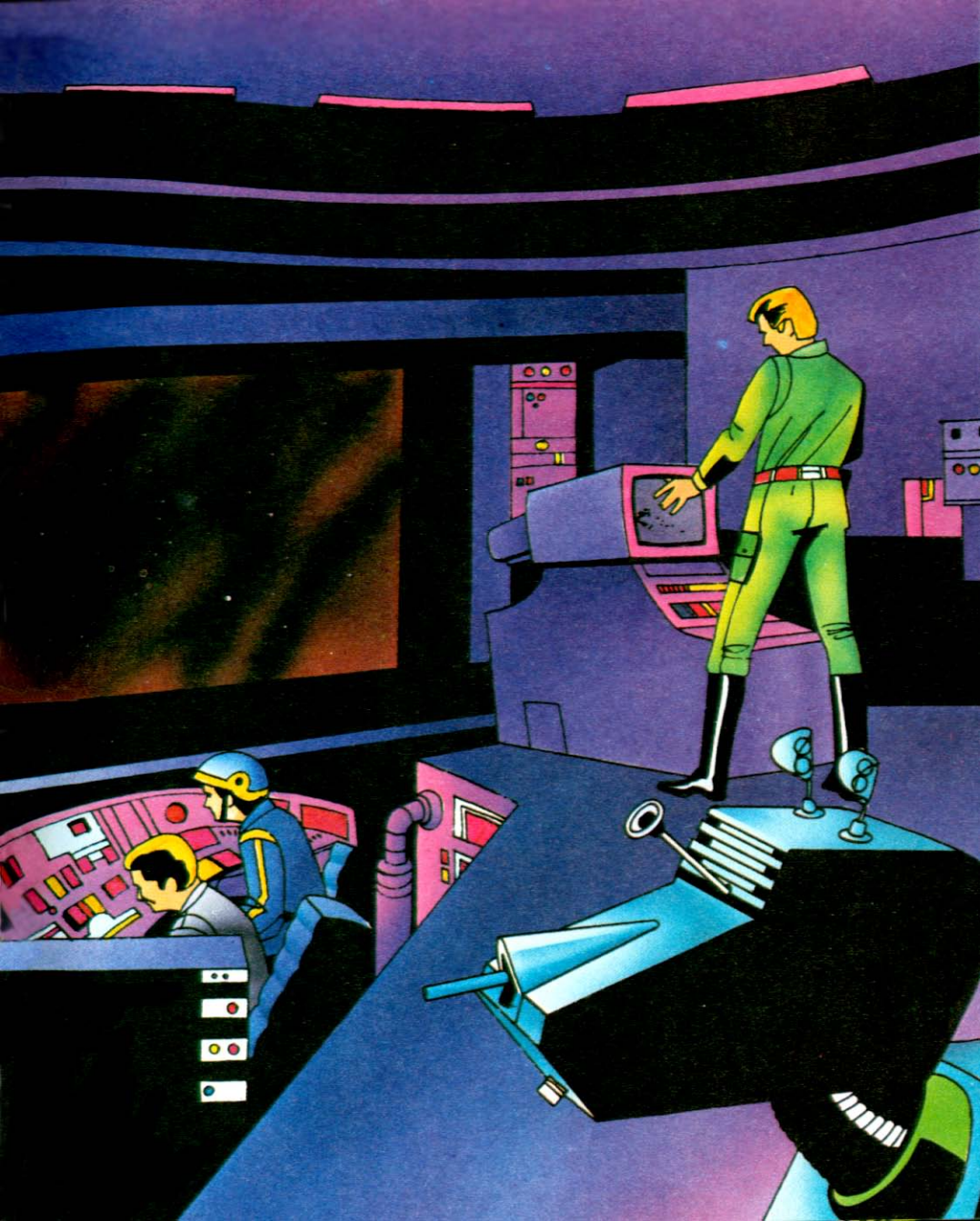
'Apart from keeping them alive, there's nothing we can do for them,' said Professor Romius. 'And one ship is still working up there.'

K9 parked his slim, white craft in orbit and watched the giant SPACESHIFTER 142 at work. They were building an artificial planet out of the rocks in the asteroid belt. The ship's struts took hold of rocks as big as islands: its rocket motors steered them into position: a dozen lasers on long slender jibs cut each enormous lump to a precise and interlocking fit.

At present, the new planet looked like a gigantic wooden puzzle-ball, with one or two pieces missing.

'When the shell is complete,' said the captain of the 142, 'we pulverise the surface and make it fertile. Then we seed it, generate an atmosphere, and in ten years it will be a green world, ready for its first settlers.' The captain paused, his face grim. 'Well, that's the theory. Whether we'll ever get around to finishing the job is another matter.'

'My sensors detect high anxiety levels in all crew members,' said K9. 'They are all afraid.'



The captain nodded. 'With four ships gone, they all think it will be our turn next. When we came here this crew was the best I've ever had. Now they argue and fight, and there is a constant threat of mutiny. We've put their wages up sky-high, but what good is that if you end up like those poor beggars in the hospital — '

An alarm siren interrupted him. The ship's computer flashed a signal: 'MALFUNCTION LASER 8! EMERGENCY! LASER 8 LOSING CONTROL!'

Jib 8
MALFUNCTION..
LASER 8!!
EMERGENCY
LASER 8. LOSING
CONTROL....

On one of the outer jibs, a laser operator was flinging his powerful laser beam wildly around the black sky. They watched the intense violet beam stab and slice at the darkness. It swung like a cutlass, dangerously close to the other jibs.

'They're coming!' the operator's voice screamed over the radio-link, 'they're coming!' And for an instant, illuminated in the laser's glare, there were fragments of the outline of an enormous shape — fur, claws, ranks of serrated fangs.'

Jibo

They watched helplessly as the laser operator leapt from the control pad. The laser swung round in great loose arcs totally out of control. The operator fell through space, clawing at his neck, ripping off his lifeline. 'It's got me!' they heard him cry as he flailed through space, away from the ship. They saw him wrench off his helmet — there was a puff of steam as his suit de-pressurised — and then silence.

The silence lasted only a fraction of a second. Then all hell broke loose on SPACESHIFTER 142. The air-waves of the radio link were filled with screams of panic and cries for help as first one operator and then another leapt from their jibs.

'Captain,' said K9 firmly, 'please do not move. Stay exactly where you are.' K9's data-com probe slid forward and touched the back of the captain's neck.

'Are you taking over my ship?'

'No,' said K9, 'your mind.'

142

Lasers lashed the blackness like whips, great chunks of rock were split in two and clouds of thick, blinding dust rolled round the stricken ship. The great metal jaws clashed open and shut, biting at nothing, as the rockhandlers tried to tackle the invisible enemy.

'We're being attacked!' shouted the captain, powerless under K9's influence. 'Let me go!'

'Regret impossible,' said K9. 'Please use patience. Your cooperation is essential.'

'We shall be destroyed!''

'Negative,' said K9. 'Please remain still.'

Outside, the ship seemed beset by a hoard of evil flickering images — fangs, jaws, claws and lashing tails. Everywhere a laser swung a monster appeared, lit only for an instant, then disappearing as though drawn by lightning, and made of night itself. The shadowy horde dwarfed the ship and attacked from all sides. The sound of panic and screaming rang out everywhere.

Like the rest of the crew, the navigation team had run in terror from the monsters. Slowly, the giant ship swung off course and began to dive end over end towards the planet it had helped to build. The captain stared ashen-faced at the hellish scene outside, unaware that his ship was plunging towards destruction.

The planet surface loomed up through the screen, frighteningly close.

'Captain,' observed K9 with his usual calm, 'collision with planet surface would seem to be imminent.'

'The beasts of Vega,' muttered the captain. 'There's nothing we can do. The navigators have gone. I can do nothing — we're doomed!'

'Incorrect,' said K9 sharply, releasing the captain, 'please do not interfere.'

He linked in to the ship's central navigational computer, pulled the SPACESHIFTER out of its dive, and switched off all the lasers.

Immediately the horde of monsters vanished.

142

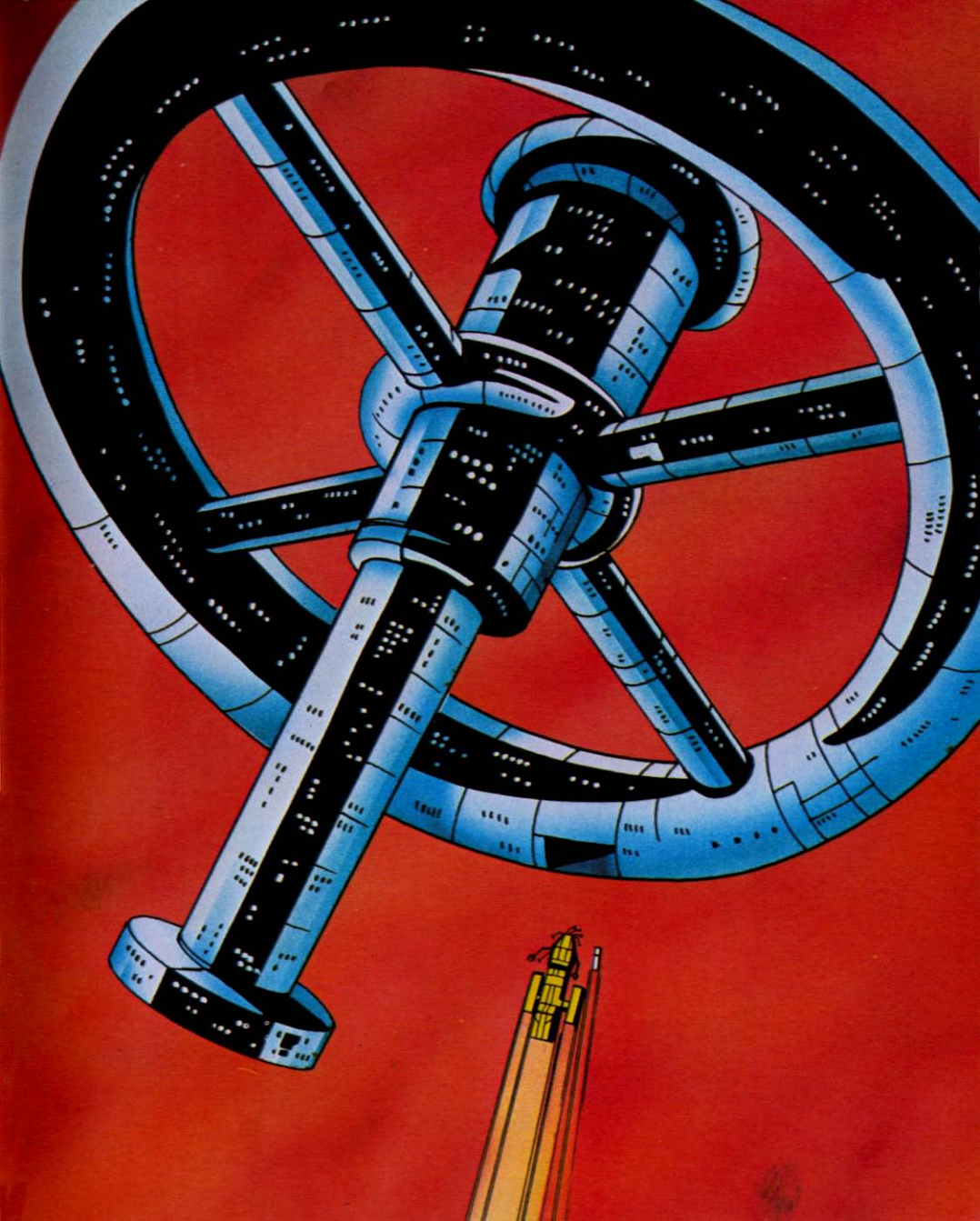
'If you poke a stick into a wasp's nest,' said K9, 'you would expect to get stung, would you not, captain?'

'Yes, but — '

'Your lasers,' continued K9 imperturbably, 'were like sticks. They irritated the Vegan life forms, so they attacked you. Every living thing defends its home, captain.'

'You mean those monsters live here?'

'Vegans live here,' said K9. 'Not monsters. The Vegan is an intelligent form of energy: what you saw were not Vegans, but your own fears.'



'They attacked your emotions, captain,' said K9. 'Since I have no program for emotion, I had to use yours. The Vegans made you see what frightens you most. The beasts of Vega exist only in your minds, captain.'

K9 turned to the professor. 'When your patients understand that, they will begin to recover.'

'But how can we build without lasers?' asked the captain.

'It took five thousand million years to make the Earth,' said K9. 'Try going more slowly.'

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THE ADVENTURES OF K9 No. 2

Outside, the space ship was surrounded by hordes of evil beasts — a mass of fangs, jaws and lashing tails. The shadowy monsters loom over the ship, attacking from all sides. Sounds of panic and screaming ring out everywhere. Only K9 keeps his usual calm.

K9, the amazing robot dog already known to millions through his star appearances in the Doctor Who T.V. series, now features in an exciting set of books of his own. The other K9 books available include:

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